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Partition

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Introduction

The Partition of India in 1947 is one of the most significant events in South Asian history. It refers to the political division of the Indian subcontinent that marked the end of British colonial rule in the region. There were three partitions in 1947—of British India and of the provinces of Bengal and Punjab—that created the new nation-states of India and a spatially fragmented West and East Pakistan. While the end of the Second World War, political outcomes of the provincial elections in 1946 and contingency were factors, long-term organizing efforts of communal organizations, both Hindu and Muslim, were also critical in influencing the events course and impact on these groups. Partition also evokes the horrific mass communal violence among Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs and resulted in the largest forced migrations in the history of the 20th century and resulted in horrific mass violence. While numbers vary, most estimates note the death toll around one million. Between 1946 and 1965, nearly nine million Hindus and Sikhs moved into India and approximately five million Muslims moved to both parts of Pakistan, resulting in massive displacement and making refugee rehabilitation one of the primary agendas in post-1947 restructuring in India and Pakistan. Partition as the twin facet of freedom remains a momentous event within the South Asian popular imagination, reinforced by family and personal memories of violence, exile, movement, and resettlement.

General Overviews

Works on the Partition are many. They range from historical monographs, edited volumes focused on different aspects of the Partition process, collections of official documents, fictional writings and first-person narratives, literary analyses of both fiction and film, and memoirs. These works can generally be divided into three broad categories—those that look at why Partition happened (see *Politics of Partition* and *Politics of Religious Identities*); those that look at what happened at Partition (see *Experience of Partition*); and those that focus on the aftermath and how Partition impacted post-1947 social, cultural, and political developments in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh (See *Aftermath: India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh*). Although writing on the Partition emerged within a couple of years after 1947 (See *Memoirs and First-Person Narratives*), historical scholarship, as is found in Philips and Wainwright 1970, on the endgames, beginning to emerge from the 1970s, of empire and the Partition. Fueled by the publication of the multivolume *The Transfer of Power 1942–1947* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1970–1983), these narratives focused on high politics and tended to view Partition as part of a British decolonization process or as the outcome of a communal national divide that had been a constant part of India's anti-colonial nationalist movement. Mehrotra 1979 highlights the role of the Indian Congress within the paradigm of Indian challenge and British response. Hasan 1993 ascribes Muslim separatism under the aegis of the Muslim League to a series of miscalculations on the part of the Congress ministries. In recent years, the focus has shifted to the human experience of Partition. While several scholars provide a focused examination of the experiential aspect of the Partition process, the authors of Khan 2007, Tan and Kudaisya 2008, and Talbot and Singh 2009 attempt to bring together a wide range of experiences and impacts under the rubric of their general overviews. Low and Brasted 1998 focuses on popular perceptions and subjective psychological experiences.

Hasan, Mushirul. *India's Partition: Process, Strategy, and Mobilization*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993.

A collection of essays that examine the events leading up to the Partition and to the birth of Pakistan. In addition to secondary articles, it contains a range of contemporary documents such as speeches by Jawaharlal Nehru, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, and Gandhi, and an excellent annotated bibliography.

Khan, Yasmin. *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007.

One of the few introductory monographs that provide a good overview of the Partition as a process of decolonization. The book uses archival records in conjunction with anecdotal evidence to examine the multiple meanings of independence and Partition. The work's primary focus is on civil servants, party workers, volunteers connected with refugee rehabilitation, and social activists and how these ordinary men and women shaped government practices.

Low, D. A., and Howard Brasted. *Freedom, Trauma, Continuities: Northern India and Independence*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1998.

Pioneering set of essays that focus on the 1940s in British India and the run-up to the Partition. The major themes include economic policy, ethnic violence, mass migrations, and the integration of the Princely States. Through the use of a comparative framework between Punjab and Bengal, the book provides the reader an excellent overview of the heterogeneity of the Partition in different regions and contexts.

Mansergh, Nicholas, and Penderel Moon. *The Transfer of Power, 1942–7*. Vols. 1–7. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1977.

An invaluable collection of primary source documents that should be the first stop for any researcher on the political history of Partition. Beginning with the Cripps Mission in 1942, the twelve volumes contain letters, memos, policy papers, and detailed minutes of meetings between various British and Indian leaders.

Mehrotra, S. R. *Towards India's Freedom and Partition*. New Delhi: Vikas, 1979.

One of the first comprehensive examinations of the high politics of the Indian anti-colonial struggle, highlighting the role of the Indian National Congress. The thirteen essays together make the argument that Partition was an unavoidable tragedy.

Philips, C. H., and Mary Doreen Wainwright. *The Partition of India: Policies and Perspectives, 1935–1947*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1970.

One of the earliest academic works on the Partition, published between the publications of the *Transfer of Power* volumes. It contains wide-ranging articles and first-person narratives from participants in the high politics of the 1940s.

Talbot, Ian, and Gurharpal Singh. *The Partition of India*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

A recent addition to the Partition corpus, it provides an excellent overview of both the high politics and the impact of the Partition process on ordinary people. It also examines the continuing legacies of the Partition within South Asia, with a focus on India and Pakistan relations.

Tan, Tai Yong, and Gyanesh Kudaisya. *Partition and Post-Colonial South Asia: A Reader*. London: Routledge, 2008.

An introductory collection of essays in three volumes that provides the reader with the different dimensions of the Partition process and its experience by the general population.

[back to top](#)

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